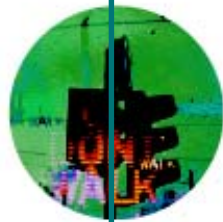




Making



Pedestrians



A Priority

*Providing an equal footing
in our transportation plans.*





Walking: the lifeblood of livable communities.

It's easy to forget that everyone is a pedestrian. And how walking is integral to our everyday lives.

While cars, buses and taxis pretty much take us where we're going, walking makes the connection. From our vehicle-of-choice to our final destination.

"The vitality of a community comes from its pedestrians, not its cars."

Tampa Tribune
July 18, 1999

How walking fits into our lives and our communities.

When time and weather are in our favor, there's nothing more pleasurable than a healthy walk. Yet, particularly in our neighborhoods, this natural option is underutilized.

The reasons are many. Increased traffic. Inadequate or non-existent pedestrian accommodations. Walkways that are non-compliant with ADA regulations. Long distances between residential and commercial areas. And so on.

It's time for our communities, through the efforts of private citizens and public officials, to take a hard look at our environment.

Together, we can make improvements for the good of pedestrians.

Every one of us.

Why pedestrians find themselves out-of-step.

There's a peril around every corner.

Walking is a perfect exercise for people of all ages. It is frequently identified as the most popular form of recreation.

But today's pedestrians have real fears. They worry about walking through a poorly lit area. About walking along roads with no sidewalks. About crossing busy intersections in front of impatient motorists — who view pedestrians as an “interruption” to traffic flow. Changing the mindset of aggressive drivers is just one challenge.

The minute you start walking, the issues become real.

Try crossing a five-lane intersection. Or try to negotiate your way through a busy mall parking lot.

With fear comes avoidance. That's why we're looking into new technologies to help pedestrians feel safer.

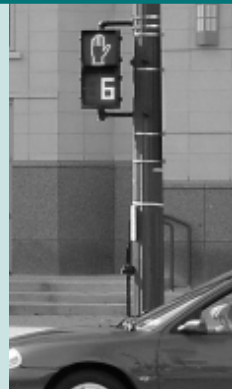
Sure, there are real and practical limitations that go with a busy system of streets and highways. But local planners and engineers must avoid the tendency to focus on roads and facilities at the expense of pedestrians.

Development can be an immobilizing force for pedestrians. It doesn't need to be.



In an effort to improve pedestrian safety, RIDOT has installed a crosswalk speed-hump at the rear of the State House. (left)

In downtown Providence, these digital Walk-Don't Walk timing lights provide a visible count-down so pedestrians won't be surprised by a sudden light change. (right)



Building pedestrian spaces into the plans.

In both the private and public sectors.

In the world of commercial development, roads and motorist accessibility are generally considered first. Pedestrian access to and around a commercial site is often a secondary consideration. Tight budgets can reduce or eliminate “amenities” such as sidewalks or pedestrian paths.

To improve the situation going forward, it will take the collaboration of private developers and state/civic planners. This can lead to more of the balanced thinking we’re starting to see. For instance, some developers are installing safeways to help pedestrians go across busy parking lots — while including more curb cuts and better lighting.

We shouldn’t throw pedestrians out with the pavement.

It is much more costly to rebuild sidewalks than simple resurfacing of the roads. On the public side, we need to look at the long-term consequences of our plans and strategies for pedestrian amenities.

Land development in Rhode Island increased 40% from 1970 to 1988: eight times faster than the population.

The upgraded intersection at County Road in Barrington: a shining example of balanced motorist pedestrian planning.



Enabling the transportation disadvantaged.

Considering seniors, the disabled and other non-drivers.

Senior citizens, disabled Rhode Islanders — and others without the means to own or operate vehicles — rely heavily on pedestrian access.

In Providence County alone, over 283 miles of sidewalks are non-compliant with American Disability Act (ADA) requirements. It would cost more than \$65 million to revise them. A proactive policy to address the retrofiting of sidewalks is crucial in this key area.



Making the transit connection.

Easy access to public transportation would improve maneuverability for all these groups. As such, our plans include the completion of a statewide network of pedestrian and bicycle paths. We'll also promote local regulations to encourage walkable, village-centered neighborhoods — with a high priority for traffic-calming and pedestrian-oriented features.

Senior citizens are at the greatest risk for injury/fatality at intersections. For instance, a pedestrian can be caught offguard by a changing signal, or struck by a motorist who is distracted while turning.

How suburbs are turning into cities.

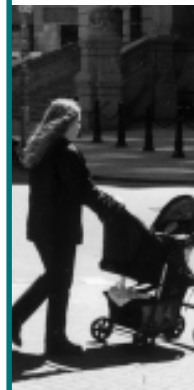
In 1900, just five Rhode Island communities were classified as core “cities”.

These pedestrian-friendly areas had houses, multi-families and businesses in close proximity. With small lot sizes. Widely available transit. An abundance of sidewalks.

By century’s end, 10 Rhode Island communities had become urbanized — many of them are former suburbs.

Although people moved to suburbs to escape the hustle-and-bustle, they missed city conveniences. Businesses decided to follow the population outward — while taking advantage of the open commercial/ industrial land. To keep the rural character of the area, many communities did not install sidewalks.

In many cases, the busier and more commercial suburbs just aren’t what they used to be.



Teaching kids to tread safely in a treacherous environment.

Most child pedestrian accidents occur on the way to school, or on the way home. Not near the school. Many are mid-block accidents where a child has suddenly darted into the street.

Since child-safety education courses have been shown to be effective in reducing crash rates, we recommend that school-trip safety committees be formed, to establish safe walking routes for students.

The pedestrian’s world has changed dramatically. It’s important to learn that at an early age.

Nationally, about 55% of pedestrian fatalities occur on neighborhood streets. But while more pedestrian accidents take place in urban environments, rural areas account for more per-capita fatalities.

Building Walkable Communities.

A vital state/local initiative to develop walkable communities.

The prioritization of pedestrian issues can no longer be an afterthought. Building walkable communities is everyone's responsibility.

RIDOT is making a concerted effort to consider the pedestrian in all transportation projects.

We're seeking similar effort from Rhode Island's cities and towns, developers, the community-at-large, and concerned pedestrians themselves — to help guide the key decisions on development of pedestrian friendly communities.

We invite open discussion about the issues at hand, the responsibilities facing organizations at all levels, and potential solutions to improve the pedestrian environment.

It's about evolutionary change. Not quick fixes.

Setting priorities is one thing. Setting goals is another.

We need to do both.

*"The goal is to make Main Street USA
a desirable place that attracts residents...
These are the kinds of programs that create
the atmosphere in which small business can
not only survive, but thrive."*

*Providence Business News
April 2, 2001*

The times are signaling a change in focus.

A truly integrated transportation system is one that provides for the effective movement of people, goods and services. People need to be a more equal part of that system.



Pedestrians can't enjoy the scenery if they're concerned about their safety.

It's time to eliminate inadequacies like poor lighting, broken "walk" signals, improperly marked crosswalks and other street hazards. It's time to look at the big picture from a foot-traveller's point-of-view.

Pedestrians need a constituency. We encourage you to get involved in your own way, and to let state and local officials know of your concerns.

There's only one way to give pedestrian issues an equal footing in our transportation system.

It's by making them a priority.

For a 5 page Executive Summary of the RIDOT Pedestrian Safety Plan, contact:

*Steven Church
Bicycle & Pedestrian Program Manager
RIDOT Intermodal Planning
Two Capitol Hill, Rm. 372
Providence, RI 02903
schurch@dot.state.ri.us
401-222-4203 x4042*

Both versions are available in hard-copy.

www.dot.state.ri.us